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ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-7

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
1 May 1987

North leaned on FBI, chief tells probe

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WASHINGTON — FBI Director William Webster told congressional probers yesterday that a high FBI official intervened in a Philadelphia bank fraud case at the request of fired White House aide Lt. Col. Oliver North.

The intervention was apparently aimed at keeping right-wing publicist Richard Miller from being questioned by the U.S. attorney who was prosecuting the fraud case.

Miller was named Wednesday by conservative fundraiser Carl Channell as a coconspirator in a plot to sell arms illegally to the Contras.

The Washington Post has reported that $1.7 million from an endowment run by Channell was funneled through Miller's public relations firm to a Swiss bank account that North and others controlled.

Improper use

Webster made the revelation during his third appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee, which is considering his nomination to succeed the ailing William Casey as CIA director.

A key concern of several committee members has been whether North, the former National Security Council aide who oversaw Iranian and Contra arms deals, was "using" the FBI improperly.

Webster said that Executive Assistant FBI Director Oliver Revell, at North's behest, called an assistant U.S. attorney in April 1986. Revell warned the prosecutor that an investigation of a man named Mousalraza Zadek, later convicted of bank fraud, had touched on a "very sensitive" aspect of U.S. negotiations to release American hostages in the Middle East.

Revell, who did not attend yesterday's hearing, served with North on a high-level White House interagency committee that was supposed to coordinate Reagan administration counter-terrorism activities.

Revell said he received a call from North, warning that the hostage negotiations could be affected if Miller had to take the witness stand in the Zadek case. Miller had had dealings with Zadek.

Webster also revealed that North attempted to gain information from FBI agents on several other matters.

In one case in January 1985, North contacted a Los Angeles FBI agent, seeking information about a group of American civilians who planned their own armed incursion into Nicaragua.

On another occasion, North met with FBI and State Department officials to discuss a request from President Jose Azcona of Honduras to provide "some kind of relief" for a Honduran general who had pleaded guilty in a plot to assassinate former Honduran President Roberto Suazo.

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